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The methods of reading instruction used and the emphasis given reading within the total elementary school program depend on the attitudes of the school administrators and the teaching personnel. While reading is commonly defined as a decoding process, it is actually a complex process of word recognition, comprehension, critical or evaluative reaction to what is read, and fusion of newly acquired knowledge with previous knowledge and experience. Each of these components of the reading process is discussed. Other factors inherent in the learner or in the learning situation which influence reading success are mentioned briefly. Among these are the teacher, the home environment, the school atmosphere, and opportunities to read and freedom to choose one's books. Oral language facility and the ability to listen with understanding are prerequisites to success in reading and should be developed early in the child through careful guidance, appropriate learning materials, and experiences which encourage him to inquire, to discover, and to create. (NS)

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Factors of the Reading Process and Their Implementation in the Total School Curriculum

The topics to be presented in this institute are obviously interrelated. Each speaker will be concerned that reading takes place in the context of a vital school curriculum geared to promote reading power in children and desirable learning in general. This paper is addressed to the topic: What are the factors involved in the reading process and how can they be implemented in the total school program at the elementary level?

What Reading Is

One's view of reading will influence the methods to be used and the place to be accorded reading in the curriculum. In other words, how the reading act is defined--the concept of what the reading act involves--determines the factors in the reading process which educators identify and strive to develop in children. Some people say that reading is a simple matter of decoding--of identifying the

visual symbols on the printed page and translating them into sounds which will enable the reader to pronounce the words as they appear on the printed page. But reading is much more than this. Essentially it is comprehending the meanings of words, sentences, paragraphs, and longer units of printed discourse and it involves, in addition to literal comprehension, the interpretation, analysis, and use of the ideas expressed.

Identifying what a mature reader does will help in setting and in implementing the reading goals for an elementary school program. Gray (3) classified the four components of the reading process as 1) word perception (the identification of the word and the understanding of its meaning), 2) comprehension (including literal and implied meanings and the significance of the communication), 3) reaction to what is read (critical, evaluative reading), and 4) assimilation (the fusion of the new ideas with previous knowledge and experience).

Strang (4) states that the psychological process of reading involves what goes on from intake, the stimulus of the printed word, to output, the individual's response in thought, spoken or written words, or action. According to Buswell (2), "Reading is not a process of rapid recognition of one word after another. Rather, it is a process of fusing the meanings of single words into a sequence of meanings. The total act of reading is, therefore, a combination of the visual recognition of words and the central thought processes that are stimulated by them." Finally, many years ago Thorndike (5) concluded from a study of the reading of paragraphs by elementary children that reading involves many elements of thought--that in reading the mind selects, softens, emphasizes, correlates, and organizes in terms of the mental set or perspective of the learner.

Truly, reading is a complex perceptual, cognitive, symbolic process. Achieving literacy is no small accomplishment for the elementary child. The following brief analysis of Gray's four aspects of the reading process substantiates its complexity.

Word Perception

Even though learning to read is more than a simple decoding process in which the child learns how to translate visual symbols into their familiar speech counterparts, this skill remains a basic and an early one. Word recognition in itself is not simple for it involves perception, which is more than seeing. The eye transmits the visual image to the brain and the chief act of perception takes place there. The symbol is assimilated, distinguished from similar symbols, associated with previous experience, and meaning is attached. The image may be perceived almost instantly as a word in the child's oral vocabulary or may be analyzed in terms of his knowledge of letter symbols and sounds. The familiar meaning which its pronunciation evokes may fit easily into the context. But these conditions are not always present.

Just how a word is recognized is not always clear. We do know that repetition plays a part; we also know that words with pleasant and meaningful associations are more easily learned than nonsense syllables or words without distinguishing visual characteristics. Knowledge of the alphabet and the sounds of letters, recent evidence would show, helps children in recognizing words, although it is possible, of course, to learn words "at sight" without such information. The big advantage that knowledge of letters and their sounds brings to children is that it enables them to understand the alphabetic nature of our language and gives them a handle for working out unfamiliar words, thus hastening growth in independence in reading.

The point is that visual perception involves not only the act of seeing but the processing of the impression into meaning based on previous knowledge and experience. Recently a child met the word mug in his reading and asked his teacher what a mug is. The teacher answered, "A glass with a handle on it." "Like that?" queried the child, pointing to the section of the schoolroom window that opened by means of a metal handle.

Materials for the beginner are usually limited to familiar words and their common meanings in order to simplify the initial process. When vocabulary and sentence structure exceed this level, then higher skills of word analysis are necessary. Some processes appropriate to the beginner sink below the level of consciousness or must be replaced with higher skills, such as noting prefixes, suffixes, syllabication, the more subtle context clues, or by reference to a dictionary.

Comprehension

The simplest form of comprehension is to know what the author stated. The meaning is embedded in the sentence, not the individual words. The more unconscious and automatic the recognition of single words becomes, however, the freer the reader is to apprehend the meaning. As linguistic scholars point out, the child's knowledge of the structure of his language enables him to anticipate the thought or, if necessary, to correct initial impressions in the light of the rest of the sentence or even succeeding sentences. Instruction should encourage children to use in reading their knowledge of how their language works.

In too many classrooms, it appears, the child is not encouraged to go beyond the level of simple comprehension. Thoughtful questions will make for thoughtful readers. For example: What does this statement imply? Is what the article tells important to us? Although this type of reading can be used even in first grade, it assumes increased importance in the intermediate grades when children do more reading in content fields. At this time children read varied materials for various purposes. Reading of social studies materials requires a different combination of comprehension skills than reading a science or an arithmetic text.

Evaluative Reading

To develop critical readers, teachers must encourage children to question as they read. An inquiring mind will judge the materials read. Does this article

make sense? Is it logically developed? Does it square with experience and with what other articles have stated? Is the author's purpose to inform or to influence? Does the material reveal a bias on the part of the author? Furthermore, any content must be evaluated in the light of the purpose for which it is read, the problem to which the reader seeks an answer.

As teachers of reading, we also have an obligation to help children read literary materials critically. They should be able to set up and use criteria for judging the appropriateness of the style to the author's purpose, for comparing the development of character in two books or the treatment of the same theme by different authors. Children can enjoy a good story or poem and at the same time gain insight into what gives a book literary distinction.

Assimulation

Children should reflect what they learn from books in their thinking, feeling, and acting. They must use what they learn from reading in later learning and in heightened sensitivity. A greater understanding of the people they read about should ensue. We watch for this, knowing that it may be evidenced in attitudes rather than in verbal statements. When children go to books for information they need in carrying on an enterprise, in pursuing an interest, or in solving a problem, they are more likely to use what they gain from books. Beyond the immediate occasion the values they absorb from reading and discussion are assimulated or, as Gray states it, the new ideas become fused with previous knowledge and experience. Briefly, these are some of the basic factors in the process of learning to read.

Other Related Factors

Facility in reading is not gained solely by mastery of the processes described so far. There are other factors that must be considered. These have to do with the learner and the learning situation. There are conditions in the child's life space, his environment, that block or facilitate reading progress. There are also aspects of the school situation which influence the

way in which these processes are mastered. Motivation is possibly an over-riding factor. What creates in the child a strong desire to learn to read and keeps this urge alive as he attempts to master the processes involved? Educators are sure that a home with books and in which reading is valued contributes to this achievement. Time does not permit development of the factors mentioned above nor others that are important. The next topic, Prerequisites for Reading, contains a partial treatment of some of them. Subsequent speakers at this institute will be calling attention to other significant factors.

Prerequisites for Reading

Reading is built upon a base of oral language and the skills which foster its development. The possession of an oral language is unique with humans, yet the young child in every culture has acquired not only a fund of words with which to communicate but also the basic structure of his particular dialect.

Ability to listen attentively with understanding predisposes children to reading success since this ability develops knowledge of the structure of his language. The give-and-take of conversation at home, on the street and play-ground develops facility in the use of speech. The school should continue this informal use of oral language for all children, but especially for children with deficits in language and in experiences which nurture and enrich language.

Scholars in developmental psychology and linguistics have emphasized the significance of the years of early childhood and have given us new insights into how intellectual powers develop in the young child, as well as the ways in which the child's speech reflects both these growing powers and his social environment.

In fostering the cognitive development of young children who come from a disadvantaged environment, the school will wish to start intervention as early

as possible and may wish to add more structure to the preschool program. Through careful guidance and appropriate materials and experiences, the children learn to classify, to categorize, to make visual and auditory discriminations, and to build associations that lead to concept development. Hopefully, we can do this without formal, mechanized procedures which ignore the natural interests of young children. When you can find time, read the article by Miriam Wilt (6) in this month's issue of The Reading Teacher for a thoughtful discussion of how the many opportunities to talk in informal, meaningful situations will promote intellectual and language development.

These prerequisites for success in reading hold true beyond the initial stage. Skill in listening is associated with success in silent reading, at least through the intermediate grades. Loban's and Strickland's studies show that facility in the use of oral language is related to reading achievement. An interesting finding reported by Loban is that those pupils who had the greatest power over their language were the ones who most frequently used language to express tentativeness, hypotheses, and conditional statements. May it be that this quality of language develops when children are encouraged to inquire, to question, and to venture opinions? If so, the use of such procedures would have a favorable effect on the higher processes of reading as well as improve the quality of school life.

Each child must achieve literacy for himself. Occasionally a curious, gifted child apparently learns to read almost entirely on his own. Usually, a combination of many factors enters into success in reading. A knowledgeable and sympathetic teacher, a supportive home, an environment which includes reading materials and experiences that are shared with one's peers, and opportunities for practice in accordance with individual prescription and to explore books by personal choice hasten the child's mastery of the processes of reading.

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